

THE PLAGUE OF WHITEWASH.

In this age of grasping at the future rather than contemplation of the past, the tardy, though highly meritorious efforts of modern antiquaries, have done comparatively little to check that course of spoliation, which bids fair speedily to overwhelm all our national antiquities. Every county in England is crowded with village churches at distances of one to two miles apart, and all of them contain matter of interest, whilst a very large proportion are full of the richest beauties of Gothic architecture.* But, to antiquary and to artist, how melancholy is the present aspect of each. The reformers and the puritans have inflicted less injury upon these noble works, than do the curiosity hunters, and the improving churchwardens of modern times. The reformation despoiled the altars, and plundered the vestments, the revolution defaced the carvings and the tombs: the fine open benches were raised and converted into pews, and the colours and gilding of the rood-screen obscured with an unimaging white; the stove chimney was made to incumber through the columns and arches of the church, and disappear through the ruthlessly broken tracery of a decorated window; the timbers of the roof were covered over with a flat ceiling, and the roof itself lowered from the original pitch. The squire erected his glazed room in the church, and made himself comfortable at "his own fireside," marring the exterior with an unsightly excrescence for a chimney. The sexton stole the brasses, and an "antiquary" purchased them. The antiquary stocked his collection with stained glass; the country squire worked up the panels from a rood-screen in his sideboard. All these and many more were the acts of robbery and spoliation common and uncared for once, and not enough noticed now. But worse than the plunder and havoc of mistaken zealots, worse than ruin and the alterations of ignorant churchwardens, is the plague of whitewash, which seems to have grasped, Bizarro-like, on cathedral and parish church in every hole and corner of the kingdom, spreading its leprosy over plain surface and moulding, stone-carving and wood panelling, and obscuring mural paintings, colour, and gilding. The infection is not destroyed, and men will never be convinced that it is better to let the tooth of time eat its way into corbel and boss—rather adding new beauties than consuming old—than to mar the contour of a moulding, or to clog up the indentations of a leaf. The very extent of effort in those to whom the country allows the guardianship of our national monuments in the making them look clean, i.e. white. The greens and browns from Nature's palette, are hidden beauties to those who deem the bucket and mop the true instruments of taste, and a whitewashed cottage the brightest ornament in a landscape. The noble interiors of Beverley Minster, of York, and of our other cathedrals, when compared with the nave of Westminster Abbey, whose columns retain their natural tints, lack much of the beauty which the latter possesses, despite the eye-sores on its walls. Rochester Cathedral was rich in mural decoration, yet it has been all obscured. At Chester, which we visited very few years since, we had, as usual, occasion to notice the ill effects of whitewash, and we ventured to express our opinion to one of the dignitaries of the cathedral, who concurred with us; yet we subsequently discovered, that he himself had not long previous given directions for an additional coat. The fine Norman doorway of the Temple Church was no sooner rid of its accumulated whitewash than it received another application. At St. Albans, St. Cuthbert's screen, rich in flowers and foliage, has all its beauty obliterated or destroyed. The clerk of the church, an intelligent man, and probably remembered by many of our readers, has taken some pains to clear a portion of this screen, and the delicacy of the carving is there apparent. At St. Mary's Church, Stafford, we were present during a portion of the late restorations, and saw the workmen remove the whitewash from some capitals, and found, that shapeless lumps concealed foliage of elegant design, having traces of painting. St. Peter's, Northampton,

till a few years ago, seemed destitute of ornament; the capitals of its columns were mere lumps, and the whole interior devoid of beauty; fortunately the state of the building attracted the attention of Miss Baker, the sister of the historian of Northamptonshire, who, at some expense, and, it is said, considerable personal labour, had the capitals freed from their covering, and they now form the most beautiful series in Anglo-Norman architecture. Haddon Hall, in Derbyshire, a perfect example of an old English residence, is preserved in its original state in all respects except the application of whitewash. The figures in relief, the ceilings, and ornaments formerly enriched with painting and gilding, periodically approach a step nearer to entire concealment. St. Paul's itself has not escaped, and the absence of the natural tints makes more than ever apparent the want of artificial colour, and receives our regret that so good an opportunity as was once available should have been lost. The colouring, in parts of Gothic churches, was a valuable instrument in the hands of the artists of the middle ages; it was applied with judgment and effect, was mostly upon plain surface, and impaired the form of neither moulding nor ornament; but the first coat of whitewash shews, like the last of Banquo's line, a mirror in which we see a long succession following after. Individual buildings there may be that have suffered little, and others which, within the last few years, have been entirely freed from whitewash, and the beauty of these is great; but we are certain that were the whole of our churches divested of what shrouds them as completely as the lava of Vesuvius did Pompeii and Herculaneum, the splendour of Gothic architecture would at once strike upon the beholder, with a witchery and a power hardly felt even in these days of restoration and research. Let us hope for the speedy establishment of a national commission for the preservation of works of art, and that one of its earliest endeavours will be in the direction pointed out. A tithe even of the small sum we devote to public works would serve to uphold what we now possess, valuable to an extent we have never felt, and hourly crumbling away beyond the hope of renewal.*

E. H.

COMPETITION OUTLINES FOR ART-UNION OF LONDON.

Ten nineteen sets of designs received by the committee in reply to their offered premium of £60, were in illustration of the following subjects:—The life of Offa, king of the East Angles; Midsummer Night's Dream; Thalaba the Destroyer; Parables; Revelations of St. John; the Watchfulness of Providence; the Rape of the Lock; Keat's Hyperion; the Commandments; Harold the Dauntless; Anne of Greenstain; the History of Joseph; Raising of Jairus's Daughter; Scott's Betrothed; Judgment of God against Sin; John Gilpin; Byron's Mystery; Life of Brutus; and Cymbeline.

After long deliberation, the committee selected the set illustrative of the Revelations of St. John, afterwards found to be by Mr. George Elgar Hicks, Lynton, Hampshire, as most fully complying with the terms of their advertisement, and awarded the premium to the author of it. Considering that much talent was displayed by some of the competitors, and anxious to stimulate young artists to exertion, they awarded honorary premiums of 20*l.* each to the authors of the three following sets:—Offa; the Watchfulness of Providence; and the Commandments; who were found to be respectively Mr. G. E. Sintzenick, of 3, Prince's-street, Fitzroy-square; Mr. William Cave Thomas, of 39, London-street, Fitzroy-square; and Mr. G. Schaff, jun., of 14, Francis-street, Bedford-square. Mr. Hicks obtained the Royal Academy medal at the last distribution of prizes; and Mr. Cave Thomas is one of the artists selected by the Fine Arts' Commissioners for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament. Amongst the most meritorious of the other designs we may mention the series from the History of Joseph; Byron's Mystery; and Thalaba.

* We have long felt the need of a national commission for the preservation of monuments, and shall take every opportunity of advocating its establishment. We shall be glad to receive communications on the best mode of clearing paintings in distemper.—E. H.

A CHAPTER ON MARBLE.

MARBLE, *marbre* French, *marmor* Latin, from the Greek *μαρμαρος*, to shine or glitter, is a term used to define numerous varieties of compact and granular limestone, which are susceptible of a superior polish, and are designated either from their colour, their age, their grain, their country or district, their degree of hardness, their weight or their defects. The general characters are,—large or small-grained, generally in distinct concretions, sometimes so fine-grained as to appear compact, and often only distinguishable by a glimmering lustre. Fracture, foliated; fragments, amorphous, blunt; weight, granitose; lustre, from glimmering to shining, between pearly and vitreous, sometimes translucent, but the black only on the edges. It consists chiefly of 50 lime and 40 carbonic acid, whence it is called by chemists and mineralogists a carbonate of lime, to which class in all strictness it belongs.

Marbles are distinguished from gypsums by the application of diluted nitric or muriatic acid, which produces a strong effervescence, by expelling the carbonic acid; but otherwise, in external character, organic disposition, and capability of polish, there is a striking similitude between many varieties of each. They embrace every degree of hardness, and the specific gravity of marble varies with its density and crystalline structure. Some of them are of one simple colour, as white or black; others streaked, or variegated with stains, clouds, veins, waves, &c., but almost all are opaque, excepting the white, which, when cut in thin slices, becomes transparent.

Of the endless varieties of marbles abounding in almost every region of the earth, vast formations, in like manner with the simple limestones, retain the evidences of organic character and composition, being crystalline masses of marine animals, and embracing, in some few instances, the bones of land animals and fresh-water shells; in almost all of them we see a certain advance towards decomposition; while in other and perhaps the more extensive beds, every trace of organization is extinguished. Geologists, on this account, have classed them as primary and secondary rocks, presuming that the absence of organic delineation denotes the more advanced age; but most erroneously so, for the preservation or decay of organic masses of calcareous animals depends more upon climate and association than upon age, and very often the same formation presents the two characteristics of this class of rock.

Again, geology infers that marble is formed from masses cooling down under intense lateral pressure, but were this the case, every trace of animal organization must have been destroyed, and the crystalline appearance would have been uniform; but so far from there being any evidence of heat or fusion, or lateral pressure, much of the coralloidal and shell-marble rests in its primary undisturbed state, the shells and corals exhibiting the uninjured outline, and so disposed as to exhibit an uninterrupted series of natural events, embracing in the one whole an epoch which has long since passed away. The existence of these organic masses in their pristine form, and disposed in spots where they formerly lived, propagated in their generations and died, and now their calcareous, concrete, and crystalline state, evidence the small amount of faith the student ought to place in modern classification and modern theories: a classification which pronounces all crystalline rocks volcanic; theories which assign various epochs to rocks and earths which are manifestly formed under the same existing causes, and at the same period of time.

Among the most remarkable varieties of marble may be mentioned the *African*, having a black ground diversified with moderately large spots, sometimes tinged a little reddish; *Alabandum marmor*, much used in building among the Romans, and distinguished by its remarkable glossy jet-black appearance; *Auvergne marble*, of a pale red mingled with violet, green, and yellow; *Proconnesus*, of a fine bright yellow colour, thickly variegated with irregular veins and spots of purple, and spots or spaces of fine semi-pellucid crystalline spar—this is a truly beautiful marble, equal in polish to the finest agate; *Carnegiean marble*, so called from its flesh colour, exhibiting shades of pale whitish and yellowish casts, and also of a rosy hue; *Cippolino*, the true Egyptian

* We intend to revert to the subject of village churches, and we shall be glad if our friends in the country will favour us with sketches and measurements, or any information as to the present state of fabrics.—E. H.